

Queensland

July to December 1997

JOHN WANNA
Division of Commerce and Administration
Griffith University

A Government Distracted

If 1996 was a horror year for the Coalition minority government, the succeeding year was not much better. The State Government reeled from one crisis to another and the political atmosphere remained highly-charged. Yet, behind the scenes ministers and departments started to get down to business and began to record some achievements. In part this was possible because an apparently knife-edge majority proved no great impediment to governing. The one comfort for the Coalition government was the almost unshakeable backing of the Independent Liz Cunningham, who could be relied on to provide support in Parliament on tests of confidence in the minority government and on most of their significant legislative proposals. Cunningham was regularly briefed on the government's legislative initiatives and on any other relevant political information the government chose to give her — so much so that she was sometimes referred to as a closet National or the 45th Coalition member. By late 1997, despite remaining beleaguered by a succession of crises, the government was approaching its second anniversary in office and began to promote its achievements and contemplate the prospects of re-election for the first time since re-taking the Treasury benches.

Unemployment levels remained stubbornly high within the state, rising to 9.8 per cent by September and remaining close to ten per cent for the rest of the year. Youth unemployment was around thirty per cent with nearly 20,000 teenagers registered as unemployed. Queensland's unemployment rates were well above the national average and the second worst mainland state behind South Australia. Despite the gloomy news on the jobs front, the government was able to point to some jobs growth (but far less than the 50,000 the Treasurer had promised in the previous budget), and to the fact that some major companies had established in Queensland — some even locating their head offices within the state. Perhaps the most important achievement was the announcement that the Boeing Corporation would establish its Australian headquarters in Queensland, bringing about 1,000 new jobs to the state. Moves by other firms to Brisbane were estimated to add a further 1,600 jobs (*Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 8 October 1997, pp. 3735-45).

Opinion polls indicated the government and the opposition were neck and neck. By mid-year the polls repeatedly showed the primary votes of both sides of politics hovering around forty to forty-one per cent. The Premier, Rob Borbidge, and the Opposition leader, Peter Beattie, both expressed the view that the forthcoming election would be tight and that neither side had shown the capacity to build a substantial lead over the other. Toward the end of 1997 the ALP appeared in front in some opinion polls on a two-party preferred basis (recording a fifty-three per cent to forty-seven per cent lead in a poll published in the *Courier-Mail* on 11 October). But both sides had

cause for concern; the drubbing handed out to the South Australian Liberals had sent a powerful message to incumbent governments; and especially in the bush, Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party added another dimension of uncertainty. Labor also had to wrestle with the political fall-out of Wik and at the state level the Party was seen to be opposing the Howard Government's amendments to the Native Title Act in the Senate.

In July 1997 the government announced the appointment of a new State Governor, Major-General Peter Arnison, to replace Leneen Forde. Arnison had retired from the army in 1996 after a "long and distinguished" career. He had then turned to running a successful rubber factory with forty employees in Brisbane. On accepting the appointment Arnison declared that he wanted to promote business and be a governor "for all Queenslanders".

The state was saddened when the former premier Wayne Goss was rushed to hospital on 21 September suffering from a brain tumour. The news was a particular shock because he had always maintained a keen commitment to personal fitness during his political life and was only forty-six years old at the time of his illness. Political leaders from all sides including the Prime Minister, Premier, and Opposition leader extended their well wishes for a speedy recovery and support to the Goss family. The three-hour operation was successful and doctors told the family that although the tumour was malignant no further treatment was required. Shortly before this incident, Goss had indicated he would resign his seat in State Parliament (Logan) at the next election and would instead contest pre-selection for the Federal seat of Oxley. The ALP delayed the pre-selection process for Oxley until 1998 to allow the former premier time to recover and consider his future. After recuperating Goss returned to work in November and resumed his position in the Assembly (he had been paired for the duration of his illness). But shortly after his return he announced he would not contest Oxley but instead take up other pursuits. His decision threw the ALP's Oxley pre-selection wide open and a fierce battle between contenders commenced.

Cheryl Kernot stunned both national and state politics when she announced her defection from the Australian Democrats and that she intended joining the ALP in Queensland. She resigned her Senate seat and announced her intention to stand for the ALP in the Federal seat of Dickson to the west of Brisbane. On this occasion the Queensland Government did not indicate it would try to circumvent the Constitution (as Borbidge had earlier indicated he might should the former ALP senator Mal Colston resign) and appointed Andrew Bartlett who was nominated by the Democrats as the replacement State Senator. Kernot's defection was generally regarded as a much needed fillip for the local ALP — especially as an early federal election seemed more certain. But, despite the Democrats remaining comparatively quiet over the defection, her decision was greeted with outright hostility by the Coalition who proceeded to launch a series of personal and occasionally scurrilous attacks on the former leader.

Growing Criticism of the Connolly-Ryan Inquiry into the CJC

In 1996 the Borbidge Government announced that it intended to conduct a formal investigation into the Criminal Justice Commission. At the time the Premier Rob Borbidge informed Cabinet he wanted a "short, sharp inquiry" and that three months was a "reasonable" time-frame. The appointment of two retired judges — Peter Connolly and Kevin Ryan — as commissioners became controversial principally because Connolly was an ex-Liberal politician who was considered close to the government. Given that the commissioners began their inquiry on 7 October, the premier's deadline was reached in early January 1997. But by the middle of 1997 after nine months of investigation, the Connolly-Ryan inquiry showed no signs of bringing its work to an end despite the fact that its main political purpose had long since been achieved — the discrediting and closing down of the rival Carruthers inquiry called by the CJC to investigate deals between the Police Union and the Coalition when in opposition and the Labor Government and the Sporting Shooters group (see Political Chronicles *AJPH* 42, 3 (1996), pp. 424-25 and 43, 3 (1997), pp. 400-01).

By June-July 1997 there was growing unease and criticism of the Connolly-Ryan inquiry within many circles even among the Coalition side of politics. There was a growing realisation that the

inquiry had become discredited, enjoyed no broad political or community support, and was not widely regarded as independent. The proceedings of the inquiry suggested that instead of undertaking a systematic review of the CJC there was more interest in muck-raking. Criticism also focused on the mounting costs. When establishing the Connolly-Ryan inquiry, Attorney-General Denver Beanland admitted it would not “come cheap”. By mid-year the Opposition was strident in its criticism of the politically-inspired inquiry which they reckoned was costing \$50,000 a day, had been given no time limit, no budget limit, and very broad terms of reference. Labor dubbed the inquiry a “multi-million dollar waste of money”. Media reports also referred to the inquiry as a “grave train” for lawyers, and of the government writing ‘blank cheques’ to cover the expected \$12 million in associated costs.

Peter Connolly brought further controversy to the inquiry by making comments to the media which left the impression that he was biased. Connolly also made personal and insulting remarks about Ken Carruthers and his decision to quit as head of the inquiry into the Police Memorandum of Understanding. Such comments strengthened the perception that the Connolly-Ryan inquiry was a political fix.

Carruthers and CJC Initiate Court Challenges to Connolly-Ryan Inquiry

In June 1997 both Ken Carruthers and the CJC filed writs with the Supreme Court accusing the commissioners of bias and attempting to limit the scope of the Connolly-Ryan inquiry. Carruthers lodged his case on 4 June to prevent Connolly-Ryan investigating his own aborted inquiry into the memorandum of understanding and the CJC joined Carruthers in a submission on 12 June. The case came before the Supreme Court and was heard by Judge James Thomas. The hearing began on 21 July and lasted fifteen days. At the hearings Professor Ross Homel, one of the CJC commissioners, informed the Supreme Court that Peter Connolly had told him that a review of the Fitzgerald reforms was now possible because “our side is back in power”. Judge Thomas also probed the extent to which the commissioners had attempted to demonstrate their fairness and impartiality.

On 5 August Judge Thomas upheld the complaints of Carruthers and the CJC, ruling that the commissioners were disqualified from conducting further proceedings and in effect closed down the inquiry. Thomas concluded that Connolly had acted toward Carruthers in a manner that was “oppressive and unfair” and that his demands had been “outrageous”. The head of an inquiry should be seen to be an independent commissioner “not an executioner” said the judge. “There is a strong case of ostensible bias on the part of Mr Connolly ... [including] a perception of his continuing favour for one side of politics.” In disqualifying Connolly, Thomas also found that Kevin Ryan did not have the power and authority to conduct the inquiry alone and “his extensive association with Mr Connolly makes a reasonable apprehension of unfairness and lack of impartiality in the result inevitable under the circumstances”. Thomas concluded that Connolly and Ryan were outside their terms of reference when they began investigating the Carruthers Inquiry while it was in existence.

The judge’s ruling was a body blow to the government and especially the Attorney-General. The *Sydney Morning Herald* described the court’s decision as confirmation that “the inquiry was a politically motivated if clumsy attempt to nobble the CJC” (7 August 1997). The *Australian* argued that Judge Thomas’ ruling “implicitly accused the Premier and the Attorney-General of ... establishing a political witch-hunt” (6 August 1997).

Following the termination of the inquiry the political debate returned to the costs involved. Various figures were given on the total costs of the two inquiries — Labor claimed that the Carruthers and Connolly-Ryan inquiries had cost \$14.5 million. The *Courier-Mail* estimated that the Connolly-Ryan inquiry has cost \$11 million and that together the two inquiries had “squandered” over \$14 million or “the equivalent of someone standing in the Queen Street Mall and tearing up \$27,000 every day” for over eighteen months (6 August 1997, p. 15). Later the

Attorney-General claimed that the direct costs came to just over \$7 million but this figure may not have included other costs associated with the inquiry.

The Passing of No-Confidence in Attorney-General Denver Beanland

The government chose not to appeal against Judge Thomas' ruling, but rather to announce that they still intended to go ahead with revisions to the Criminal Justice Act and a restructuring of the CJC. They also announced their intention of establishing a Crime Commission to take over some of the crime responsibilities attached to the CJC — some of which the CJC was by its own admission not actively pursuing such as organised paedophilia.

At the same time there was widespread condemnation of the highly political manner in which Denver Beanland had conducted himself as Attorney-General — supposedly the first law officer of the Crown. The Labor Opposition demanded Beanland resign or be sacked over the débâcle — and they were not alone in this view. The *Courier-Mail* carried an editorial on 26 July stating "Beanland has failed in his duty to put justice first". The week following the Thomas judgement the paper again demanded Beanland's resignation, adding that the "biased CJC probe means that the A-G must go" (6 August 1997). They kept up the campaign — and even in late August were still demanding Beanland should go or be sacked (30 August 1997).

But the Premier decided to tough it out despite the political costs. At the first news conference called after Thomas' ruling Borbidge stood symbolically by his minister who looked fraught and dejected (there were some media rumours that Beanland had privately offered the Premier his resignation but it had not been accepted — the Premier denied this). The storm did not dissipate and with Parliament about to resume the Opposition announced that it would move a no-confidence motion in the government and in the Attorney-General. On 19 August Liz Cunningham voted with the Coalition to defeat the motion of no-confidence in the government (forty-five to forty-four after the Speaker's deciding vote). But on the following day she voted with the Opposition to pass a no-confidence motion in Denver Beanland as Attorney-General (with 45 to 43 in favour). Yet, after this vote Beanland refused publicly to resign and the Premier refused to sack him. They highlighted comments made by Cunningham outside the House that the motion was tougher than she would have preferred and that she did not intend Beanland to resign when she declared her lack of confidence in him as the first law officer.

The Premier sought legal advice which provided him with a defence based on a selective interpretation of the state's constitution and on the issue of whether any previous conventions had already been established regarding ministerial resignations. The defence strained credibility in terms of accepted notions of accountable behaviour under the Westminster system of responsible government. In a Ministerial Statement to Parliament, the Premier stated:

where a government still enjoys the confidence of the House, the selection of the ministry is a matter for the prime minister or the premier ... there is no clear convention that would require the premier to dismiss an individual minister who has been made the subject of a motion of no confidence in the House ... The Crown Solicitor advised that the position adopted by the individual minister is not absolutely clear ... The Crown Solicitor advised: ... 'on the material which I have uncovered to date, there does not appear to be any clear obligation on a minister (in respect of whom a no confidence motion has been passed) to, as a matter of constitutional convention, offer his resignation to the premier' ... The Crown Solicitor advised: 'provided the government of the day enjoys the confidence of the House, the governor may only appoint or dismiss a minister of the Crown on the advice of the premier ... certainly there appears to be no convention requiring the governor to dismiss a minister who declines to resign following a vote of no confidence ... I do not see that his Excellency the Governor as a matter of constitutional convention would now have any role to play in relation to the tenure of the relevant minister' ... The House continues to have confidence in this government.

Although the Premier stated that there was no clear convention for him (or the Governor) to dismiss a minister in such circumstances this was simply an acknowledgement that the matter of a

minister not resigning after a successful vote of no-confidence had never occurred before in the state's history. In effect the new constitutional interpretation advanced by the Premier argued that ministers were not individual ministers accountable to Parliament but only accountable to him as Premier. Accordingly all ministers were merely "ministers assisting the Premier" who survived at the grace of the Premier of the day. But even this reasoning seemed contradicted by recent evidence — as in the case in 1987 when the then Governor Sir Walter Campbell refused Premier Bjelke-Petersen's request to sack a group of his ministers. The Premier's actions and arguments served to weaken further parliamentary accountability in Queensland.

Beanland hung on as a minister only because the Premier chose to stand solidly behind him. The Premier's actions could be explained as loyalty to a colleague, or as an acknowledgement that the two of them were in this together. Alternatively, there was a feeling in some quarters that the Premier (and Police Minister Russell Cooper) were considerably indebted to Beanland for his previous actions as Attorney-General. As it transpired the lawyers responsible for bringing the final recommendations forward from the Carruthers inquiry (Robert Gotterson QC and Brendan Butler QC) had not recommended charges be brought against either Borbidge or Cooper. This eventual "exoneration" meant that the legal costs of their defence were able to be paid from the public purse.

Beanland came in for further attack from the head of the CJC, Frank Clair, who was critical of the Attorney-General's role in the CJC review process and of his announced intention to oversee "reforms" to the CJC Act. Clair considered it "inappropriate" for Beanland to be involved in this review and asserted "he's shown himself to be really the last person who ought to be making any assessment of the CJC's role and performance" (ABC Transcript 22 August 1997).

The war between the government and the CJC continued. Despite Clair's reservations, the government pushed ahead with the review and introduced both a new Crime Commission and amendments to the Criminal Justice Act in late 1997. The Crime Commission was responsible to a minister (rather than directly to Parliament as was the CJC) and was charged with solving major crime including organised paedophilia. The changes to the CJ Act provided for the appointment of a Criminal Justice Commissioner to oversee and investigate the accountability of the CJC. The Parliamentary Commissioner would report to the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee.

Queensland's Reaction to the High Court's Decision on State Franchise Taxes

On 5 August 1997 the High Court handed down a decision ruling that "state franchise taxes" were essentially excise taxes and therefore unconstitutional. The case had been brought before the Court by opponents of the NSW tobacco franchise fee (which was levied on turnover). The decision also affected state petrol, alcohol and tobacco turnover taxes which were similarly classified as excise taxes and declared illegal. The Court's decision applied to all state governments. In the days after the ruling many industry operators began suggesting that if the taxes were unconstitutional they were due compensation. For the states the consequences were dire, with the Court's judgement appearing to deal a blow to state differentiation and their capacity to impose variability of tax rates. Not surprisingly, state premiers and treasurers were up in arms over the decision — despite having years of warning (and some contingency planning) that eventually such a decision could go against them. The Commonwealth offered to collect equivalent new national tax surcharges to make up the losses for the states, but the Commonwealth could only impose uniform rates across the entire nation and the Federal Treasurer Peter Costello insisted that they did not want to see an increase in prices for these goods. The Commonwealth was prepared to impose the highest state rate on wholesalers but would not permit states to profit from "windfall" revenues. States would have to hand back the taxes at the state level so as not to increase the existing rates of taxation. This raised many administrative problems.

In Queensland the problems were doubly complex because the state did not levy petrol taxes, and rates of taxation differed from other states on tobacco and alcohol. The prospect of uniform

national taxes was not welcomed by the State Government, which like its many predecessors had given explicit commitments to maintain the state's status as a low taxing regime. The alternative for Queensland was to entertain the prospect of expensive methods of reimbursement to wholesalers and retailers so that prices would not rise. While the arrangements were still settling down, Commonwealth and State Treasury made hurried plans to implement a feasible repayment scheme for fuel suppliers. On 13 October the Prime Minister and Premier in a joint announcement confirmed that both governments had agreed on a fuel subsidy scheme to reimburse fuel suppliers and bulk end users. There were, however, allegations from the Opposition and some industry groups that the administrative arrangements were cumbersome and costly. The Opposition also accused the State Government of forfeiting up to \$80 million per year on the deal it negotiated with the Federal Government over fuel tax rebates (because the state only received funding on a per capita basis not according to actual fuel consumed). The long-term impact of the Court's decision was likely to expedite the introduction of a general goods and service tax (GST) across Australia.

In October the Opposition leaked a confidential briefing paper on taxation reform that had been prepared collectively by the official steering group for the states and territories. The discussion paper canvassed proposals to introduce additional taxes and surcharges, in particular a value-added tax or goods and service tax which would be levied by the Federal Government but the states would gain a fixed share of the revenue. The Opposition claimed that this document represented a "secret tax agenda" promoted by Coalition governments at the Commonwealth and state levels. The Queensland Treasurer, Joan Sheldon, argued that Queensland officials had only participated on a "no commitment basis" but added that "we have to be able to increase the revenue base into the state for the services we provide".

The Public Service "Hit List"

In August a former director and long-time strategist of the National Party, Mike Evans, told a Conservative Club breakfast in Brisbane that while working in the Premier's Office he had personally screened public servants to uncover those who had links to the ALP or who might have been sympathetic to the former Labor Government. Evans told the audience that "I took the microscope, I looked at government departments and I came across all these cells of Labor Party supporters". He suggested that some departments were "laced very much with Labor Party operatives" and "they're leaking things to the media to make sure that a negative agenda is coming through". Following this admission, he then went on to ask the presidents of the Liberal and National parties (Bob Carroll and David Russell respectively) whether they had "made any decisions on what is to be done to try to stop that situation or remove those people?" (*Australian*, 30 August 1997).

Copies of the so-called "hit list" had been circulating for months and the matter had been referred to the CJC for investigation. The "Hit List" with 120 names recorded was organised on a department-by-department basis with the names of suspects identified along with idiosyncratic comments about known allegiances, political partners or spouses, and occasional comments on performance. The list appeared to be a working document intended to expose known or supposed Labor Party sympathisers. But as Labor was quick to point out it was neither accurate nor systematic. The Opposition leader described the admission by Evans as evidence that the government was politicising the public service and "trying to weed out people who were not pro the government". The Premier publicly denied any knowledge of the "hit list".

In September during a hearing into the dismissal of Ms Jacki Byrne (the sacked director-general of the Family Services department), Arthur Muhl, a member of the Premier's transition to government committee admitted that a "hit list" was passed to the committee by Ms Wendy Armstrong. According to Muhl the "hit list" was circulated to the committee but was regarded as "dangerous and lacking in substance" (*Australian*, 12 September 1997). He confirmed that the original list was "much more scurrilous" than the one which had subsequently been circulated. He also asserted that Ms Armstrong would not disclose the identity of the author(s) of the document

and that he had passed his copy of the list on to Mike Evans who was then working in the Premier's Office.

In response to the government's vendetta, Peter Beattie later clarified how an incoming Labor Government would behave, saying that Labor would not retain the services of the "Coalition's Dad's Army of recycled, former senior executives". In his statement Beattie ruled out a "bloodbath" and committed Labor to a professional career public service. But he acknowledged that only about "two or three" current directors-general would be likely to remain if Labor were elected.

Bob Bottom, Rumours of Sexual Impropriety and Allegations of Paedophilia

Amid the other controversies to dog the government throughout 1997, politicians on both sides found themselves enmeshed in sordid allegations of sexual impropriety, cover-ups, and turning a blind eye to organised paedophilia networks. The *Courier-Mail* began running a series of articles attempting to expose paedophilia, alleging that the corrupt former Police Commissioner Terry Lewis had kept "dirt files" on the sexual practices of well-known local identities. The interstate press also took an interest. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that "allegations of organised paedophilia networks and secret police 'dirt files' [were] mounting daily, the names of prominent Queenslanders — judges and senior politicians included — are being whispered in connection with all manner of smutty goings-on" (23 August 1997).

Russell Grenning, a former associate of Main Roads Minister Russ Hinze and staffer with Police Minister Russell Cooper, was reported as having come under police investigation in 1983 in connection with receiving pornographic material, and that the investigation was dropped at the time because of "political reasons". Grenning was subsequently "outed" as a homosexual and in the process resigned from Cooper's staff. In a letter to the Opposition leader, Grenning wrote "should this matter degenerate into a slanging match about the private lives of politicians and their staff, there are more than a few on your side of the House — past and present — who would suffer unfairly as I have".

In unrelated developments a series of allegations appeared over paedophile rackets existing in Queensland. The member for Whitsunday, Lorraine Bird, alleged that an organised paedophilia network was operating in Whitsunday island resorts. Police reports acknowledged that some such problem had emerged in the past but had been stamped out, and Bird provided little new evidence. From other sources the Queensland Children's Commission released a report on paedophilia which was tabled in Parliament in late August. The report on paedophilia was written and compiled by the head of the QCC, Norm Alford, and a consultant adviser Bob Bottom — the NSW author and crime crusader. According to Alford and Bottom's calculations Queensland had 300 hard core active paedophiles, many of whom had been protected by police. They claimed that paedophiles included "two or three judges, a former cabinet minister, former MPs from both sides of politics and senior police" (*SMH* 23 August 1997).

After the CJC moved to investigate one of these matters, Bob Bottom went on radio to claim that the CJC had launched a "Watergate style raid on a policewoman at Southport seeking material on a particular political figure ... it wasn't concerning paedophilia. It was over sexual habits". The policewoman in question was allegedly related to Terry Lewis. Rumours again circulated that in 1984 a then serving National Party minister had taken a backbench colleague to Brett's Boys male brothel in Kelvin Grove. The former minister was no longer in Parliament but the alleged backbencher was supposedly a serving senior minister in the government. The ABC's *7.30 Report* broadcast that "the alleged patronage of this male brothel in 1984 by a current senior member of the Coalition government is now at the centre of the corruption storm in Queensland ... promis[ing] to keep the stoush between the Queensland government and the CJC going for some considerable time yet" (ABC Transcript, 28 August 1997). The allegations of involvement by a senior member of the government were denied by the Premier who told Parliament "as leader of this government I

am unaware, totally unaware of the claims and whether those claims have any substance whatsoever. I have no knowledge of any such details or any member of this government being implicated in respect to the allegations being made" (*Australian*, 30-31 August 1997).

The immediate loser to suffer from the scandal was Bob Bottom, whose services were quickly dispensed with the day after he made his outburst on radio. After his extraordinary intervention which only served to fan wider interest in the scandal, he was summarily dismissed by the Police Minister, Russell Cooper, who stated that he had decided on reflection not to "formalise his [Bottom's] appointment to advise on the investigation of organised crime and paedophilia" (*Australian*, 30-31 August 1997).

The "Banana Bank": Privatisation of Suncorp-Metway

The government pushed ahead with the privatisation of the amalgamated "state bank" of Suncorp-Metway in September. The so-called "Banana Bank" (because of the elaborate government intervention undertaken to retain ownership in Queensland) included a sizeable portion of public ownership estimated to be around \$610 million (from Suncorp and the QIDC). The state government opted to sell its holding to Queenslanders by issuing a public offer of "exchange instalment notes". These notes were partly paid on application (\$3 each), with a further instalment one year later (\$3.10 due in September 1998). On 1 November 1999 the notes held by investors would be exchanged for shares in the company. After a short but intensive publicity campaign the public offer was highly sought after and the notes over-subscribed. The Treasurer announced that "92%" of the float went to Queenslanders or existing Suncorp-Metway shareholders. The fact that Queenslanders received favoured treatment which allowed them to purchase larger portions of notes was locally popular but damaged the pro-business reputation of the government in southern markets.

Other Distractions and Shenanigans

The Speaker of Parliament, Neil Turner, announced that he supported the reintroduction of an Upper House in Queensland even though this was not the official policy of the National Party. He told journalists he would prefer that a referendum be held (as the Nationals had promised in the 1995 state election campaign) so that the people could decide on the issue, but that the final decision to put such a question was not for him to decide personally. Turner linked the possible establishment of an upper chamber with the option of curtailing the CJC's role or powers. He believed "we should have an upper house elected by the people, answerable to the people, that monitors the Parliament in preference to an organisation like the Criminal Justice Commission which really in my opinion is just an ongoing type of Royal Commission that is virtually answerable to no one, voted in by no one, costing a tremendous amount of money" (ABC Transcript, 25 September 1997). He later clarified that the establishment of an Upper House would improve the monitoring and review of Parliament but not necessarily result in the abolition of the CJC.

Of more immediate interest to the government was the decision to replace the government's jet aircraft (which had been a controversial political issue since the days of Bjelke-Petersen). The Premier announced in October that the government had decided to sell its fourteen-year old Westwing jet and purchase a Hawker 800 XP jet at a cost of \$11.4 million (to be bought by the Queensland Treasury Corporation and leased by the government). The jets were used by government members as they toured the state or attended regional areas for official functions. But the official reason for the upgrade was that the jets were also used for organ transplant transportation — and so a new more reliable jet was needed to retrieve organs from distant donors.

Finally, the Tourism Minister, Bruce Davidson, did not entirely cover himself in glory when he ventured to South Africa and returned promising a white Rhino park for northern Queensland.

Davidson was anxious to chalk some runs on the board in his portfolio and allowed some initial enthusiasm for the project to get the better of him. It subsequently transpired that the minister was a little uncertain of the facts in relation to the necessary habitat and permits to export members of this endangered species. It seemed some of the species were too endangered to be re-located, that it would be unlikely the relevant African governments would grant export permits, and that the vegetation and climate in north Queensland may not be appropriate. When such difficulties emerged Davidson became the object of some criticism and ridicule. He was accused of wasting public funds, and of using public money to subsidise a tourism venture. When other gaffes were made on top of this Davidson was branded "the master of mistakes" but unlike others on the Coalition front bench he was able to weather such attacks and remain in the ministry.
